

GamerZines

ISSUE 06 | JULY 2013

First Look

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HANDS-ON PREVIEW

The Elder Scrolls

— O N L I N E —

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WELCOME TO FirstLook



Sometimes magazine deadlines can really kick a writer in the most saggy of fleshy parts, but other times they can offer an opportunity to do something different and that's exactly what this special issue of *FirstLook Magazine* represents. Now that E3 is well

and truly out of the way we can finally pick apart what's important about the games industry's annual marketing bonanza: the games. In a special feature we identify the key trends at this year's show and the stories which are set to resonate with gamers long after the LA Convention Centre has shut its doors.

Aside from all that flashy nonsense, we've also got the regular stable of previews and features you've come to expect from this increasingly popular e-mag, including a lengthy hands-on with *The Elder Scrolls Online*, a campaign-map focused preview of the ever impressive *Total War: Rome II* and we find out exactly what kind of craziness is driving the return of *Wolfenstein* to consoles and PC. Happy reading!

Andy Griffiths, Editor
FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

Still picking over
some delectable
pre-orders...



Andy Griffiths
Enjoying E3 while sat at home.

Don't miss!
*This month's
top highlights!*



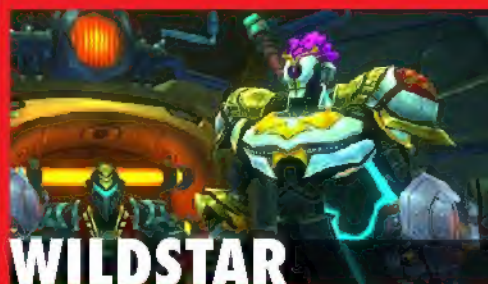
**THE ELDER
SCROLLS ONLINE**



**WOLFENSTEIN:
THE NEW ORDER**



**TOTAL WAR:
ROME II**



WILDSTAR

FirstLook | Contents



**Bearing witness to
THE EVIL WITHIN**



**Inescapable trends of
E3 2013**

QUICK FINDER



Titanfall
Dead Rising 3
The Elder
Scrolls Online
Wolfenstein:
The New Order
Dragon's
Prophet
Inescapable
E3 2013 Trends
Pre-Order
Must Haves

Need for
Speed: Rivals
The Evil Within
Wildstar
Total War:
Rome II
Ashes Cricket
2013
DLC and UGC
Round-up

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PREVIEW

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TITANFALL

PUB: EA
DEV: RESPAWN ENT.
PLAT: PC, XBOX 360,
XBOX ONE
ETA: 2014

FROM COD TO MECHS

Whether it's your personal cup of tea or not, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* changed the way gamers and developers thought of competitive multiplayer in the previous console generation, so it would be fair to say that there's a lot of interest in seeing what exactly the talent behind that ridiculously successful game think is the next big thing when it comes to shooting your mates online. *Titanfall* is the culmination of that vision, with a online-only framework which blends competitive multiplayer with single-player components furthering a plot centring on a scrappy militia taking down the unsurprisingly sinister

'Interstellar Manufacturing Corporation' (winner of E3's 'Blandest Baddie' award) in a bleak version of humanity's space-faring future.

The setting sees giant mechs battling superhuman military warriors able to freerun off the sides of buildings and scale two-storey robots in a single leap. Either side can change from fighting on foot to piloting mechs, with players able to instantly call in their walking tank of choice via orbital drop. Fast, fluid and inevitably *Call of Duty*-like – with on-screen pop-ups clarifying player kills – *Titanfall* looks innovative and potentially hugely popular. We can't wait to learn more. ■



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TOM CLANCY'S

PLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

COMING AUGUST 23RD



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FEATURING THE RETURN OF SPIES VS. MERCS



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PREVIEW



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NEED FOR SPEED RIVALS

PUB: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: GHOST GAMES
CRITERION SOFTWARE
PLATFORMS: PC,
XBOX 360, XBOX ONE,
PS3, PS4
ETA: 19TH NOVEMBER

NEW BLOOD AND NEW HOPE

The *Need for Speed* series is fast becoming gaming's 'race away from the cops' franchise and if we're honest we aren't entirely sure how we feel about that. It used to be the case that the *Need for Speed* brand used to try different things, be it legalised street racing with *ProStreet*, an upgrade-a-thon like *Underground* or a live-action cop drama a la *Undercover*, but now it seems the series has basically become a way to keep Criterion busy until they figure out what they want to do with the next *Burnout*. This year that trend changes, as *Rivals* once again focuses on

cops tracking down illegal street racers and vice-versa, but the helm is being handed over to new Swedish developer Ghost Games.

At the moment we don't know too much about *Rivals* other than it'll be powered by DICE's Frostbite 3, features an improved version of Autolog and an open-world format, but visually at least it seems this year's *Need for Speed* will be genuinely different from the more recent iterations. Here's hoping some fresh blood will restore some originality to this once daring franchise. We're sure to find out more soon. ■



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PREVIEW

DEAD RISING 3

PUB: CAPCOM

DEV: CAPCOM VANCOUVER

PLATFORMS: XBOX ONE

ETA: SEPTEMBER

CAPCOM GETS SERIOUS

There are two components which define *Dead Rising* as a series: po-faced silliness and zombie genocide with everyday objects. *Dead Rising 3* certainly has the last one with its reveal featuring new protagonist, mechanic Nick Ramos, combining a sledgehammer and chainsaw to assuredly gory effect, but we're unsure if the sequel's new dark approach has any of the humour of its forebears.

To the developers' credit, this iteration of Capcom's other zombie killing series does seem a marked step up from the previous games. Enemies fill the screen

in intimidating numbers and the open-world setting of Los Perdidos is bigger than Willamette Mall and Fortune City combined. Visually and tonally *Dead Rising 3* seems a little bland, which for a series which used to be so outrageous is strange. The controversial gameclock and saving via toilets is still in there via a 'Nightmare' difficulty mode, so perhaps Capcom are playing up this series' new direction to attract a new crowd.

Is *Dead Rising 3* a different direction for this series? Certainly seems so, but we just hope it isn't too different that existing fans feel alienated. ■



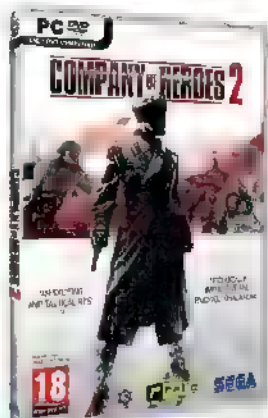
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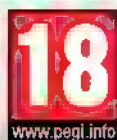
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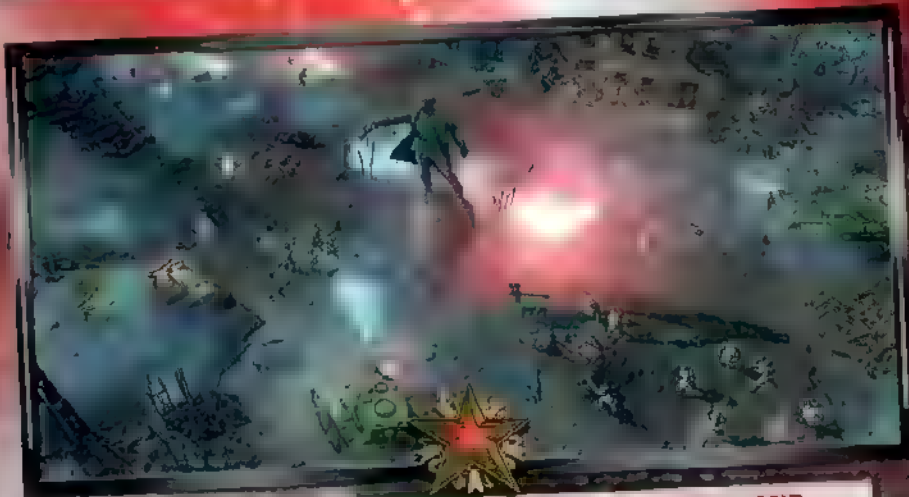
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PLAYSTATION 4

The Internet's newest darling...

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and looking back on just how excited gamers were about the PlayStation 4 during its unveiling at E3 was borderline excessive. Yes Sony are maintaining the status quo regarding disc-based DRM, yes they are ensuring that customers can still trade in games/sell them on eBay without having to let the license holder know, but really that's only half the battle. What's really important when it comes to establishing

a new platform is the number and quality of games on offer come launch day. Frankly the PlayStation 4's looked a little light, with less exclusives than Microsoft. *DriveClub* looks good, as does the cute platformer *Knack*, but most of the other releases are third-party which are understandably available on next and current-gen consoles. The PlayStation 4 is cheaper (priced at \$399/€399/£349), but that's only part of the battle.



PUB/DEV: SONY
ETA: 22ND NOV



XBOX ONE

PUB/DEV: MICROSOFT
ETA: 17TH SEPTEMBER

The ongoing game ownership scuzzbutt and a high price point (£429/\$499/€499) scuppered what was otherwise a promising E3 showing from Microsoft. They were also the only console manufacturer to

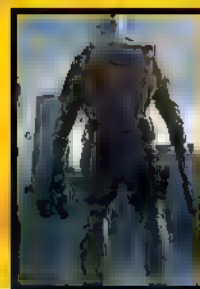
produce a pre-order friendly edition of their hardware. The Xbox One: Day One Edition includes an exclusive achievement (gah) and a specially etched controller. It's the little things in life.

TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: UBISOFT MASSIVE
PLAT: XBOX ONE, PS4
ETA: 2014

Nestled neatly at the end of Ubisoft's E3 conference was *The Division*. A tactical MMO shooter which features a team of highly trained operatives trying to impose order in a

persistent online world where governments have ceased to exist. Aside from a promising demo, details were thin regarding this new release, but people are still pre-ordering it in droves!



FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

PUB: MICROSOFT
DEV: TURN 10 STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX ONE
ETA: NOVEMBER

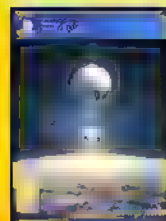


Console launches and racing games often go hand-in-hand, but even we were surprised when Microsoft confirmed *Forza 5* was coming to Xbox One as a launch title. New for

this iteration is a partnership with IndyCar, higher fidelity car models and a driver AI mapping system which ties player behaviour to an online 'Drivatar' profile. Bizarre!

PUB: ACTIVISION
DEV: BUNGIE
PLAT: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4, XBOX 360
ETA: TBA

DESTINY



Bungie's *Destiny* was finally properly unveiled at E3, with gameplay videos, screenshots and discussion on what this new game from the creators of *Halo* is actually about! Easily summed

up, *Destiny* is a persistent online FPS with a new sci-fi universe, campaign and competitive multiplayer, with players able to customise everything from their ship to their rifle.

TEARAWAY

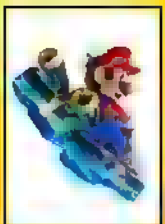


For all of Sony's hijinks at E3, the PlayStation Vita was largely ignored, except for hints that the handheld could be used as a remote play device for its console cousin. Nevertheless

Tearaway, an imaginative release from the makers of *LittleBigPlanet*, still looked exciting, boasting gameplay which made the most of Vita's mic, camera and touchpads.

PUB: SONY
DEV: MEDIA MOLECULE
PLAT: VITA
ETA: 25TH AUGUST

MARIO KART 8



PUB: NINTENDO
DEV: IN HOUSE
PLAT: WIIU
ETA: TBA

We have friends that hate racing games with a passion, yet they'll happily obsess over every conceivable detail when it comes to a new *Mario Kart*. Nintendo's series has the ability to transcend genre preferences and the eighth iteration features 12-opponent races, new anti-gravity sections and 60 frames per-second visuals. Another reason to get a WiiU.

THE CREW



PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: IVORY TOWER
PLAT: XBOX ONE, PS4, PC
ETA: 2014

The makers of *Test Drive Unlimited 2*, Eden Games, were given a rough deal when they were closed by Atari last year. The good news is they're back with a new MMO-style racing game with players working together to customise cars and tackle *Heist*-style missions in a giant online recreation of the USA. *Test Drive* evolved indeed.

Bearing witness to...



Here's a true story for you. While watching April's live-action reveal trailer for *The Evil Within* I was actually devouring a rather delicious ham sandwich. A rookie error I know, but the ensuing bloodcurdling imagery delivered by the trailer actually made me throw up in my mouth a little. Sure, it isn't not the kind of quote that you'd expect to see on the back of some box art, but it does speak to the uncomfortable visceral nature of this new horror experience from the creator of *Resident Evil*, Shinji Mikami. The thing is I'm not usually a wuss about blood, squealing sounds or human pain, so it was an impressive testament to the impact of the trailer that my gag reflex was initiated.

Needless to say then, I was actually quite nervous about seeing *The Evil Within*'s first gameplay demo at a suitably spooky makeshift cinema inside a pleasant countryside Hampshire manor. There was something a bit too '*Resident Evil*' about the whole thing, with the manor probably hiding a door to Umbrella Corp if we looked long and hard enough, but that's from a different series. *The Evil Within* is a completely new franchise, but as we found while bearing witness to Tango Games' new enterprise, some survival horror tropes are almost unavoidable. And to my credit I managed to keep my lunch down throughout the whole 30-minute demo.

OVERVIEW

The Evil Within is a story-driven and linear third-person horror action game with tense level exploration, puzzle solving and chase sequences punctuated by occasional combat with both melee and projectile weaponry. It's currently being developed at Tokyo's Tango Gameworks, who were founded by former Capcom and Platinum Games developer legend Shinji Mikami. In March 2011, and surprisingly this horror experience utilises a substantially modified version of id Tech5 to power the game's visuals and gameplay. That's the boring stuff out of the way, the most promising aspect of this release is that it represents the next big-budget survival horror experience channelling both **Resident Evil 4** and the distinctly Japanese trope of consistently chucking out messed up imagery, characters and set pieces at a player without having to explain away the mystique. Here's a play-by-play of the demo to offer up an explanation of what I mean.



PROLOGUE

The campaign's prologue kicks off with the player character, a cop named Sebastian Castellanos, investigating a disturbance at a nearby hospital. Multiple police units have been sent in, but after investigating the disturbance they've gone silent and Sebastian is sent in to find out why.

Inevitably enough, all is not what it seems, as he comes across half a dozen blood-soaked bodies in the hospital's reception area. The culprit seems to be a ghost-like Assassin blinking in and out of existence as will easily killing all cops that get in its way. Seb sees all this play out in front of him, as the assassin realises he's being watched he instantly and impossibly teleports into the CCTV room. Seb finds himself in and stabs him in the chest, seemingly killing him in one fatal blow.



FLIGHT OR FIGHT

Of course, that's nowhere near the end of the game or even the demo. Next the camera pans up to show Seb awakening from his forced slumber. Hanging upside down and listening to his own blood dripping from a massive wound, as nearby a bulky yet mysterious hooded butcher hacks at one



of the many nearby hanging bodies kitted out in police uniforms. Near to Seb, the horrible hatchet man severs one man's torso from his legs in several disgusting swipes.

Yes, **The Evil Within** is exceptionally violent, unsettling and gory, with the severed torso expelling blood all over the butcher's floor before he takes the stump to his table to cut into meat, but all of this is seen from Seb's hanging perspective with the

view switching from first to third-person as the player then manages to extract a handily placed knife from another hanging body to cut the stricken cop free.



From there, the predominantly cut-scene-based demo centres on player control with Seb carefully manoeuvred around the busy bulky butcher in a crouched stealthy fashion before he steals his keys to get out of the room and run away from the now chainsaw-wielding maniac. The revving chainsaw acts as a disturbing audio cue to the enemy's presence and there seems to be some kind of cover mechanic facilitating opportunities to hide in the shadows, and cupboards allowing the would-be predator to be viewed without getting caught. This sequence proved tense and at times surprisingly humorous with the butcher at one point giving up the chase to trap Seb in a room packed with alternating giant six-foot tall chainsaws which seemingly had no other purpose other than liquefying

fleshy parts. After a daring roll away from the butcher into a lift, our protagonist find himself outside only to see the city utterly wrecked, with the buildings and landscape itself jutting out and into one another indicating that some kind of apocalyptic event has befallen the metropolis while Seb was fleeing the suddenly sign-posted Beacon Mental Hospital.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

Like any great survival horror experience, there's always a question of whether the player is perceiving actual reality or whether it's all in Seb's psyche. Knowing Mikami's work, we suspect this central theme is constantly toyed with in the campaign with another section, grabbed from much later in the game, showing Seb fighting off angry mutilated villagers, not unlike

Resident Evil 4 and a little bit of combat...it may have just been the protagonist's trenchcoat and pistol weapon, but combat during this hold-out section, situated in a decrepit house, looked to us a bit like Remedy's **Alan Wake** – with players still able to aim with precision and cast out mines to protect certain entry points in the house. What puzzled us



the most about the section was the revelation from the game's Producer Jason Bergman that the player doesn't need to fight these enemies at all; in fact, they'll continue to spawn until the player retreats into the basement of the house triggering a set-piece which instantly transports Seb away from the home to a dingy white hallway seemingly free from enemies.

The gameplay reasoning behind this kind of smokescreen is unclear, but it does prove that Mikami and co. want to play around with the concept of player perception and keep proceedings thoroughly unpredictable. They don't want you to feel comfortable taking part in this single-player experience; they want to constantly surprise and entertain, taking participants out of their comfort zone at every opportunity. This inclination was proven correct when a random half-woman, half-spider creature suddenly spawned in the aforementioned hallway and skewered our hero like he was a barbecued sausage. Not typically the way to end a press demo, but we'll take it.

Judging a game after only seeing a 30-minute demo is silly, but I did come away from seeing *The Evil Within* really impressed. This narrative offers the kind of experience *Resident Evil* used to be, before Capcom started chasing the mass market dime, and boasts lots of tense scares and genuinely jarring imagery. If

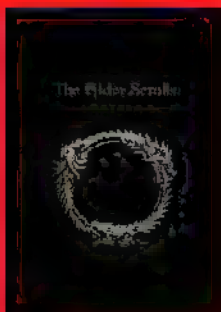
Mikami makes the rest of the campaign as arresting as what we witnessed then this could be the kind of atmospheric, unpredictable and cinematic horror experience gamers have been demanding for years. Just make sure you don't play this on a full stomach... ■

Andy Griffiths

PREVIEW

THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

HANDS-ON



PUB: BETHESDA
SOFTWARES

DEV: ZENIMAX ONLINE
STUDIOS

LAST GAME: N/A

PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX
ONE, PLAYSTATION 4

ETA: SPRING 2014

Tamriel transformed


If making a game is a scary proposition then making an MMO must be pants wettingly terrifying! Server costs, player load, longevity, crafting, PvP, the word MMO alone is enough to bring the average developer out in cold sweats. Just ask anyone who used to work at BioWare Austin or the hardworking folks at the now defunct Paragon Studios. It's this kind of thinking we suspect that has made Matt Firor and his colleagues at Zenimax Online do

everything they can to not call *The Elder Scrolls Online* (TESO) the most dreaded of terms, an MMORPG. Their multi-million dollar project work is a role-playing game which you can play online with potentially a massive number of online players in a persistent open world, but it isn't an MMORPG. Yeah okay.

This somewhat uncomfortable repositioning of TESO's image to the masses does inevitably seem like more of a marketing trick than any kind of readdressing of



FirstLook | Preview

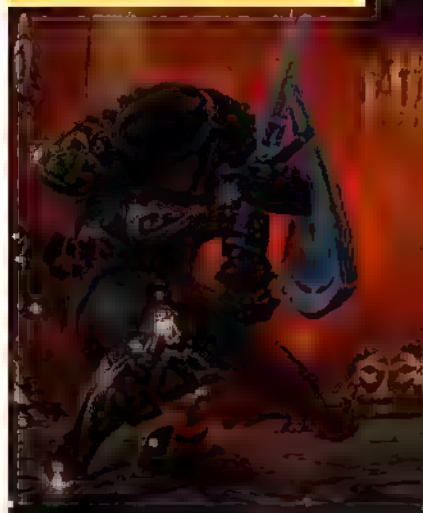
A character in ornate, glowing armor stands in a dark, industrial setting. The armor is highly detailed with glowing orange and yellow accents. The character has a large, feathered headdress. In the background, there are dark, industrial structures and a large, glowing orange light source. The overall atmosphere is dark and mysterious.

"Server costs, player load,
longevity, crafting, PvP...
the word MMO alone
is enough to bring the
average developer out
in cold sweats"



Combining the landmasses of *Skyrim*, *Oblivion* and *Morrowind* results in a massive world to explore, but level gating does have a part to play in breaking up this content

Blocking and strafing away from attacks remains a key part of combat



Towns and villages don't feel as full as other games in the series, but that's because Zenimax plan on filling them with real players, not AI

public expectations, especially after the recent reveal that this game is coming to next-gen consoles. And after we chatted with Matt for 20 fascinating minutes, even we had to admit, we came out of the interview thinking 'Well if *TESO* really isn't an MMORPG, then exactly what is it?'

After sitting down at a demo stations for 20 minutes we finally got our answer, and the good news is we really enjoyed ourselves.

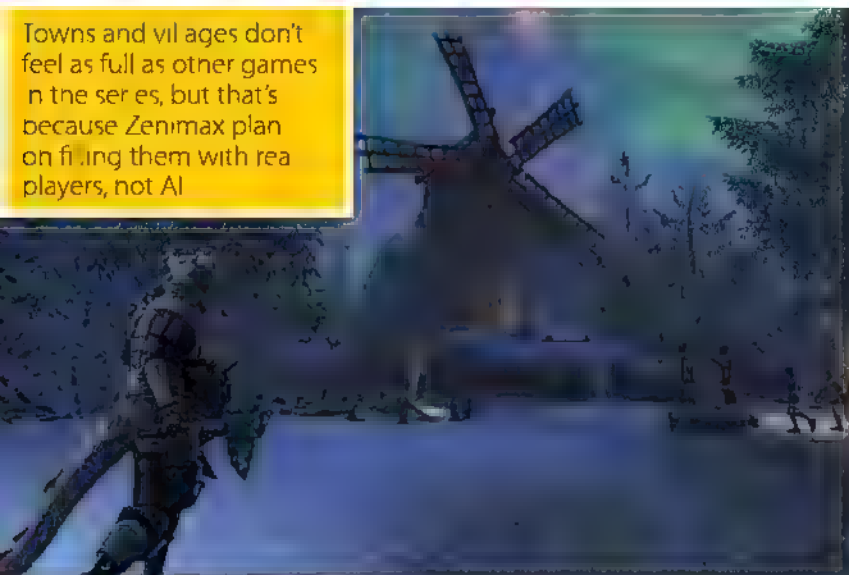
TESO really is an *Elder Scrolls* game first and an MMORPG second, with

classes boasting a freeform structure with any classes being able to wield a shield and sword, bow and arrow, mace or staff regardless what choices they made in the character creation stage. Any weapon you use you'll get more proficient at and unlock new skills with class choice only governing the natural alignment of that character's expertise.

"TESO really is an Elder Scrolls game first and an MMORPG second"

For our hands-on we had a number of level 6 templates available to select, along with class and race choices. We went for an Templar Orc because the green ones are known across Tamriel for their armour expertise and that choosing a Healer class is a good test of any MMO... sorry online multiplayer RPG.

Instantly my rather fetching Warrior named 'Grunter' was flung into the city-state of Daggerfall, surrounded





INTERVIEW

MATT FIRCH

Game Producer

***Elder Scrolls* is a massive single-player RPG franchise and *Elder Scrolls Online* is an MMO. Tropes like having a meaningful impact on the world and having your actions mean something... do you think those things are exclusive to single-player experiences, or do you think they can happen in MMOs as well?**

No, they can definitely happen, although I would rather characterise this game as an *Elder Scrolls* multiplayer game than an MMO. We want both groups to feel very happy in the game, but when you sit down and play it you'll think it's an *Elder Scrolls* game first. If you played the PC versions of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* this is the same control system. Same mouse-driven combat, you have a reticle in the middle of the screen, you aim you aim you don't tab lock. Obviously the more you play it, the more multiplayer stuff kind of comes in, but when there's choices to be made regarding player impact on world, we go the *Elder Scrolls* route not the MMO route.

That's an interesting distinction to make as I think the term MMO has almost become a dirty word with some developers. It's something which has become harder and harder to define, but at the same point the word MMO can scare away a lot of potential players...

The whole MMO genre is widening immensely now from what it used to be five years ago, but we have it easy on this project. Our frame of reference is *Morrowind*, *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*, with this multiplayer stuff built in, so we'll go down that route before we go down the MMO one.

Considering that stance, was there ever any consideration towards a more instanced approach to *The Elder Scrolls Online*, with players teaming up in an outpost and then going out together into a quest or mission area? The *Guild Wars* approach if you will...

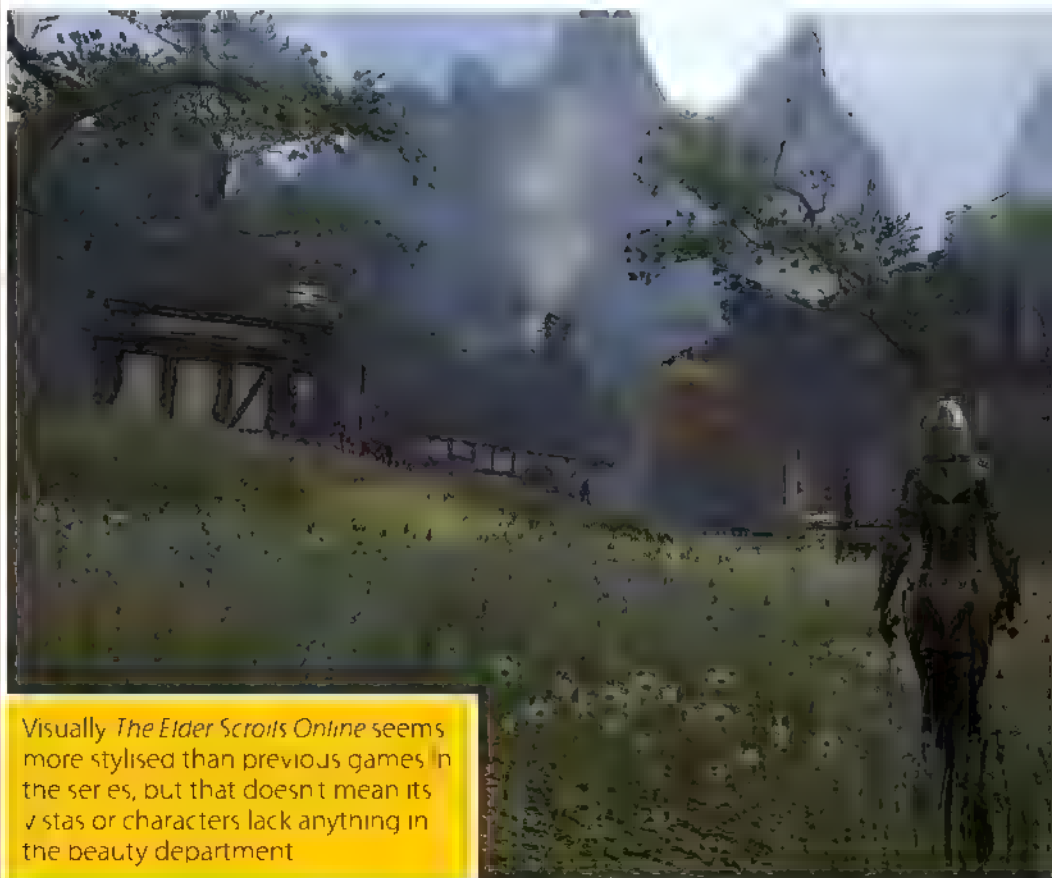
There are some technical limits to that as well, but the way we wanted to do it was that it's more of a living world. I really think it's important that when players meet each other, we're a very solo friendly game with the IP. We don't want players to necessarily meet each other in an interface window, we want them to run into each other in the world. If you're exploring a long-lost ruin and there's another guy there, that's your chance to say, "Hey, let's go do this together!" That's the way we want the social interaction to work. It's kind of what you're saying but we want to use that to our advantage that you see other people out there running around.

by other European press all jump ng around for attent on wonder ng what to do next.

The UI felt like an MMORPG with skills tied to a hot bar at the bottom of the screen, a points-based unlock skill unlock system mapped across multiple trees and dance, cheer and sit emotes to allow for quick persona expression, but the world itself was much more ripe for playful hijinks. Options to steal from villagers and interact with books nestled in a vendor's shelf brought instantly brought us back to the feelings we felt in *Skyrim*, even with a mini-map and quests placed in the top right hand corner of the screen.

Following our personal *Elder Scrolls* tradition we decided to ignore every quest in the modable UI and instead headed out into the open-world and soon found ourselves in the neighbouring region of Glumora where we came across a serene lake and a forest free of roaming enemies. Unlike lots of other online games it seems *TESO's* landscape isn't chock full of





Visually *The Elder Scrolls Online* seems more stylised than previous games in the series, but that doesn't mean its vistas or characters lack anything in the beauty department

enemies. Like *Skyrim* there's lots of open areas to just wander around and those little touches like butterflies fluttering across the landscape offer an ambience and atmosphere, a lot of other games lack and of course the flying insects can be instantly plucked from the air granting players wings and other easily craftable items. All loot has its basis on reality, so you won't somehow get a sword from a dead elk or whatever. What you loot is the creature itself, not whatever crazy item they had implausibly eaten that day.

We guided our character for a good 10 more minutes, just admiring the lay of the land and seeing where the wind took us. There were no pop-ups telling us we weren't powerful enough or over-levelled for a particular area, and the landscape

in-front of us was varied and stretched on and on. Zenimax has nailed that sense of exploration *Elder Scrolls* games seem to exclusively possess, but their approximation of combat is a bit more traditional.

"What you loot is the creature itself, not whatever crazy item they had implausibly eaten that day"

Even though *TESO* doesn't rely on auto-targetting the increased latency of combat, and the necessary requirement to only look in the direction of an enemy in order to sling out ranged attacks did bring back that MMO vibe. We found as we came across our first prey – giant



red ostrich-like birds fostering their young in mountain caves – that combat just felt a little cold and predictable with our charged up javelin-throwing enemies back off cliff edges for easy kills. Yes, there's still room for a player to use their ingenuity in battle, but as we instantly switched between sword and bow and arrow weapon choices we never found an option which really clicked. This may be due to the lack of any first-person mode, which Zenimax assured us would be in the final release build, but we think the nature of the online infrastructure means that combat cannot be so active or, put more accurately, latency heavy.

Combat aside, we definitely felt connected with this world and that connection increased as soon as we got to try out our first quest. ➤

INTERVIEW

The Elder Scrolls name has such a pull with gamers, but the people behind the series have a similarly impressive aura around them as well, like Ken Rolston (*Morrowind*). Did you get in contact with him or anyone else who has worked on previous *Elder Scrolls* games to get their input?

The way that we're attached to or work with Bethesda Games Studios is much more about making sure the IP is consistent across all games. We have a lore group at ZOS (Zenimax Online), and they of course have a lore group there, so we have a central repository of all the books and all the characters and we work with them to make sure that that is updated with our stuff too. We go back and forth a lot on what would happen in 'this' time and they give us of input. We work with them constantly that way.

The flavours between *Skyrim*, *Morrowind* and *Oblivion* are really different, so trying to merge them into one continent/area must be really difficult.

It's interesting that you say that, because one of the good things about the older *Elder Scrolls* games is that they concentrate on one province. So it's easy to have a different flavour because it's a different part of the world. We actually have those all in the game, so if you go to *Skyrim* it feels like *Skyrim*, if you go to *Morrowind* it still feels like those provinces.

With regards to the way you've designed the landscape, obviously you've got Tamriel in there, *Morrowind* in there and *Skyrim* in there. Are the landmasses the same or have you had to shrink things down? Are all the key landmarks in there?

In general, the philosophy we took was if there was an area in an *Elder Scrolls* game that's modern, by that I mean *Morrowind*, *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*, we generally took it as it is. If you go to our *Cyrodill*, it's the height-map from *Cyrodill* – it's very, very similar. We had to take some liberties because of the PvP game, we had to make sure there were flat services for that, but in general you can find places and take screenshots of our version of *Cyrodill* and it's remarkably similar [to *Oblivion*] and I hope players do that because it's a lot of fun. What we do with *Skyrim* and *Morrowind* is that the alliances as they are, are the civilised part of the world. There are still vast parts of the world, as we know it from the other games, that are uncivilised, and over time we'll be releasing those as post-launch content. If you go to our version of *Skyrim* there's *Riften* and *Windhelm*, but there's vast parts of it which are not explored.

***Elder Scrolls* games have always had a great atmosphere and a large part of that is Jeremy Soule's epic scores. Is he involved?**

PREVIEW



"Adopting the moral high ground can sometimes stop one from getting paid"



Like *Skyrim* before it, quest givers don't have massive exclamation marks on their head, instead they glow with a subtle aura and when you initiate conversations the face of the NPC fills the left-hand side of the screen while the right-hand side holds the conversation options. Some offer quests, others are vendors and the occasional miscreant mumbles the same set of lines over and over, but as we ventured further into Glenumbra we found a small village circle with a bunch of NPCs occupying the middle. We approached a fellow Ork named 'Bumnoy', who told us that he needed assistance helping two brothers who had gone missing in the local nest-filled mountains which we had been harvesting for kills previously. We didn't come across any brothers or any pop-ups alerting us to a nearby quest. Nevertheless we accompanied the unfortunately

Bethesda to discuss being able to quest with friends was a ways *The Elder Scrolls* series' most commonly requested feature and now we can see why



named Ork to his bungling friends Balin and Amrel who were blaming each other for setting ground-based traps for birds, told of their hunt to capture said giant fowl for the benefit of a town lord who was investigating why the foes were so enraged in the first place. Inevitably all was not what it had appeared and the quest unraveled in a way which was not only surprising during every step, but the result of it also made us think about how adopting the moral high ground can sometimes stop one from getting paid

There were multiple moral choices along the way, including an option to lie to a leader of the struggling mercenary group to allow his fellow men to get paid, as he was far too kind to be involved in such a cut-throat (sometimes literally) business. A particular player action governed whether the group continued or be disbanded to the ➤

INTERVIEW

He's done the main theme, and we wanted the soundtrack to sound older because we're set a thousand years before the other games. We gave him some guidance as we wanted the score to sound a little more primitive, a little older, but we have a very war-themed game with the PvP system so we wanted the score to put that across.

That's the thing with the PvP system, as it involves so many players. What are the challenges to having hundreds of players on-screen at the same time?

It's a huge challenge. If you run our recommended spec, you can see two hundred players on-screen which is a tall order, but we've done it. We've built the engine from the ground up to support that system, so it's there, it works. We're in Beta testing right now, but we'll need thousands, tens of thousands of testers to get that PvP system fully working.

With regards to the end-game stuff, how much does that play a part in securing the longevity of the game?

It's immensely important, but you can't force a player to do the end-game because that makes it sound like it's a different game and it's really not. You can start the PvP system when you're level 10, you're just not quite as good as the other guys. If you want to jump in and help your alliance at level 10 you can do that. We want to make sure that you can solo the entire alliance.

We just announced that you can play the other alliances after you finish yours and solo that too. So we want to make sure there's a wide variety of stuff to do. End game, I understand is a technical MMO term, but it's really kind of misleading because it makes it sound like it's one game to get to level 50 and another game after that, and it's really not.

End-game is really just about emergent gameplay. Rather than the developer producing more story-based content it's relying on the community to pitch in and do their own thing...

You give them tools to do that, and the PvP system is one of them.

What other tools do you have?

Our crafting system focuses at the highest level on augmenting stuff that you already have. So it means the solo player would want to buy something from a crafter just as much as a PvP player. It works across the board.

Will there be an option to augment UI?

We have a LUI-based UI, so you'll be able to modify that.



Some enemies and locations will prove instantly familiar, others less so.



Armour sets and weapon choices are largely as you'd expect.



detriment of its members, but then *Elder Scrolls* always offered personal, challenging and well-written questlines and Zenimax Online has produced at least one really great one.

During this quest we didn't really get a sense of the grand narrative involving daedric prince Molag Bol trying to pull the land of Tamrie including his hellish dimension or how the 100 vs 100 PvP end-game would work, but we did get a sense of how *TESO* would play moment-to-moment and the great news is that this is very much the multiplayer-enabled *Elder Scrolls* experience Zenimax has promised all along with UI, quest make-up and world design all echoing the epic fantasy franchise.

After spending a brief hour with their work it's easy to understand why Zenimax and Bethesda want to move away from labelling *TESO* an MMORPG, as there really isn't any

need to group up to play. Aside from seeing those aforementioned fellow 'journos' team up and take down one of Molag Bol's anchors by taking down a boss and a few minions, we could easily see this game more suitable for a two- or three-person co-op rather than giant raiding teams. Thankfully the world isn't instanced and instead takes place on one giant shard, so in theory it would be easy to put together massive 50-person raiding parties together but really we didn't see any need for that.

We were told it is possible to tackle almost every piece of content from level 1 to 50 including the main questline and factions on your lonesome, which for seeing as Bethesda are telling folks that'll take 150 hours minimum to get through that's a big ask, but we can see the most committed *Elder Scrolls* fans doing it as this ancient period, set



1,000 years before *Skyrim*, is new territory for the series.

Obviously there's still plenty of questions left to be answered regarding *TESO*, including which payment model we'll be given, how evel-gated content will be and just now the currently PC-only interface will work on consoles, but the good news is that this is shaping up to be a well-rounded, entertaining and worthwhile online experience whichever way the masses decide to label it. Some will say it's an MMO, others will call it an RPG but the vast majority of players frankly will be having too much fun to care, and that really is the main thing. ■

INTERVIEW

It's amazing how far the *Elder Scrolls* series has evolved, but there are certain things that people expect like radiant AI. Is that something you have?

It's interesting, in the early parts of us talking about the game, I've had a lot of questions about that recently. Radiant AI was actually made to make the world seem alive, but we have thousands of other players, so we don't need it. You're going to see people doing stuff all over the game, but they're other players. It's the same thing with companions, but why would you want an AI companion when you can meet three friends and go play?

Do you have any plans for player vendor stuff?

We do, but we're not going to talk about that, mostly because we're working on the system right now, but we absolutely do.

So *TESO* will have a first-person view. How does it work?

Basically we modelled it exactly on *Skyrim* and *Oblivion*. We are a 360-degree game whereas *Skyrim* is much more of a [forward] facing game, so there will be times when you'll want to go out into third-person and we're making that as seamless as possible, going from third to first.

Another thing that really interested me was the time travel element, with players able to pick up an item and be transported back in time to see that item's lineage. That gives you scope to explore a lot of *The Elder Scrolls Universe's* key events. Is that basically the idea?

We do have a lot of quests where you can go back and see things, but there's a lot of other content, too. We highlighted one of those at E3 last year and that's still one of my favourite quests in the game. There's plenty of different types. There's going back in time, exploring and many different things.

This'll be my last question and I'm sure you get asked it all the time but I have to ask it. Dragons... are they in the game at all?

So as we all know [spoiler alert for anyone that hasn't finished *Skyrim*] the dragons aren't in our time. They were well before *Elder Scrolls Online* and then they were teleported into the future.

Must be tempting to add them in the future though, right?

[laughs] No it's fine, we have plenty of stories.

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PREVIEW

WILDSTAR

HANDS-ON

Carbine Studios walks us through the Settler

If we were to sum up *Wildstar* in one simple word it would be 'wacky'. Now we don't mean wacky in a kind of Timmy Mallett, Saturday morning cartoon show kind of way. What we really mean is that Carbine Studio's debut creation is unashamedly unhinged and unpredictable with an emphasis on fun and frivolity, which is a far cry from what you'd expect from the MMORPG genre's usual super serious vibes of say *Guild Wars 2* or *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. Both visually and tonally *Wildstar* is really more a kin to *World of Warcraft*, but that comparison isn't fair to the litany of daring, new gameplay systems associated with this release.

During a recent hands-on op Carbine plonked us down at a PC to sample two new paths: the Settler


and the Scientist. Functioning in addition to class, faction and race choices – paths determine the world interactions players have available to them, and rather than go for the R&D focused Scientist with his handy-dandy scanning bot and Galactic Codex which needs filing out, we went with the social creature known as the Settler. Even during recent hands-on sessions when we took the Explorer and Soldier paths for a spin, we always wondered how the Settler, the only path with the ability to build persistent structures in the online world, would work and after two hours in a level 14-20 zone dubbed Algoroc, we finally got to find out.

In typical MMO fashion, how players interact with the environment in *Wildstar* is governed by HUD



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"Both visually and tonally, Wildstar is really more akin to World of Warcraft, but really that comparison isn't fair to the litany of daring, new gameplay systems associated with this release"

path...

markers, each of which designates something the player can interact with. For other classes this isn't an immersion-breaking issue, as you rarely come across the tell-tale square brackets during general questing, but with the Settler that isn't the case.

We spawned inside a Fae-town under constant attack from Dominion forces and we soon found our screen bombarded with dozens of different interactive objects from scattered rubble lying on the ground to dozens of lanterns that needed to be activated, and as first impressions go it wasn't quite the empowering experience we expected.

Rather than a noble prospector bringing technology and wisdom to a backwards town, we felt more like a janitor or a parent cleaning up the

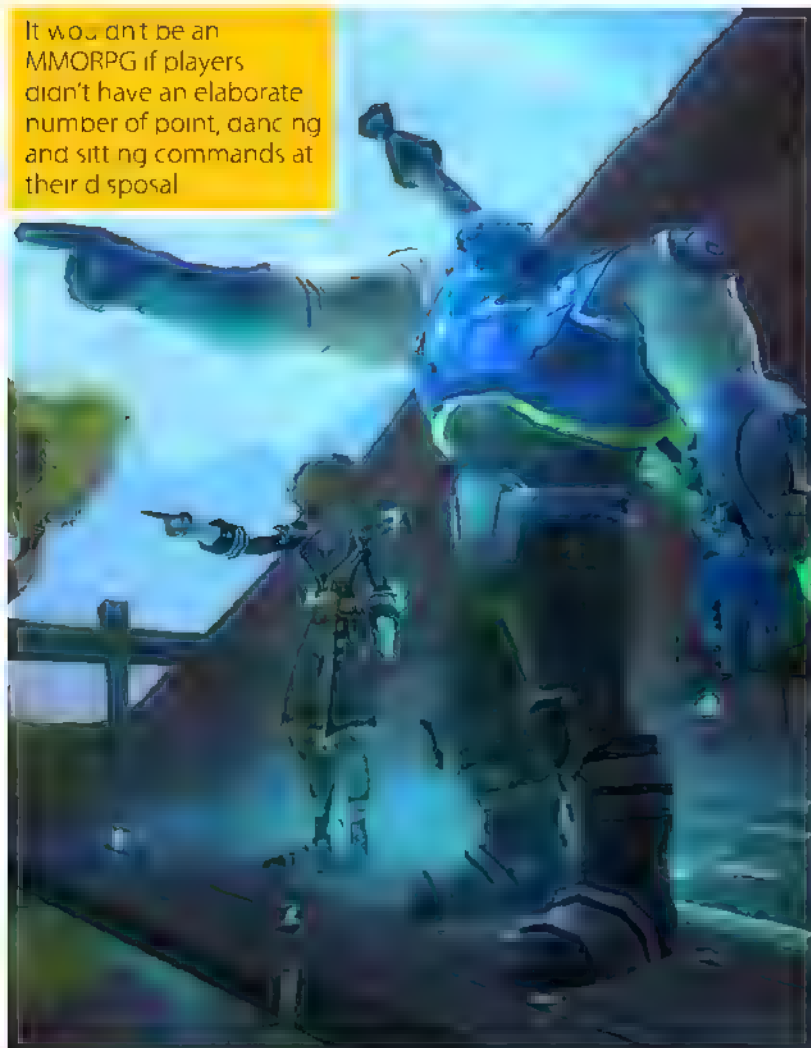
landscape allowing the more destructively minded paths to have more fun. Thankfully this feeling subsided as we progressed further into the town and spotted some rubble languishing by a glowing totem. Upon clicking this item we were offered a litany of build options including a resistance enhancer (makes any player who strays into this object's effect field more resistant to enemy attacks, Tech Totem Vendor (more gear to buy) and other potential buffs/vendors.

The potential of this path may sound minor, especially when you consider that each build order only lasts a maximum of five minutes, but these orders are stackable and the cost for each is, in the grand scheme, tiny. All we needed was a ➤

Widstar borrows just as many motifs from Westerns as it does sci-fi



It wouldn't be an MMORPG if players didn't have an elaborate number of point, danc ng and sitt ng commands at their disposal



dozen or so 'Pulsating Power Crystals' and 'Structural Carbon Rods' to create the most basic of structures, and we came across dozens of each simply by exploring the world and fighting monsters.

"We can imagine Carbine running wild with the Settler concept, for instance offering the option to build a big shield emitter next to a boss"

Getting an impression of how significant a Settler's actions will be on busy servers – ours was only inhabited by only a dozen players – is rather difficult, but by only using resources found during the demo we were able to make sure a health-buffing outpost stayed functional for hours simply by



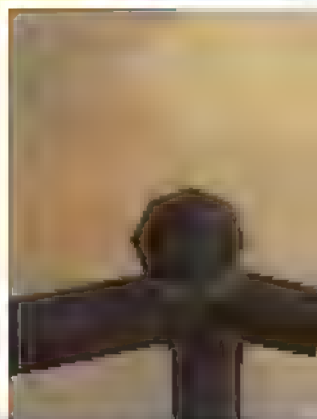
The ability to build resurrection spots in the world is something the vast majority of MMORPGs would restrict players from doing, but *Wildstar* allows Settlers to do this with ease

reapplying our order multiple times, guaranteeing that our personal impact on the always-on, persistent world would be felt long after we logged off.

Obviously there are limits to what a Settler can build in any chosen area and it's impossible to just plot down critical outposts like a resurrection spot wherever a player deems. That


said, we can imagine Carbine running wild with the Settler concept, for instance offering the option to build a big shield emitter next to a boss or allowing a network of Settlers to create elaborate speeder transport grids allowing easy traversal for all other paths.

Like with our last hands-on, we didn't really get a sense of the wider >



PLAYER HOUSING

Whereas only Settlers can build in the open-world, any path can build and customise their own little slice of paradise in *Wildstar*. These plots are separate from the open-world and need to be cleared out via a selection of quests before homes can be built. There's a multitude of different architectural designs that can be chosen and, when built, players can invite their friends round, rearrange furniture and customise the surroundings with plants and quest trophies. Guilds also have their own instanced areas dubbed Warplots, with competing cliques able to steal areas off of each other in grand 40 versus 40 battles. Sounds intriguingly dangerous.



Planet Nexus, the setting for *Wildstar*, is full of varied magic items and tech, like crystals which allow players to vault a two-storey building in a single leap.



Dominion versus Exile narrative while playing, instead this MMORPG gave off more of a sandbox vibe with pop-ups constantly alerting players to new activities, be it the potential to earn an achievement by killing a number of enemies before a timer runs out, scoreboard events and other motivators to keep you involved in what would otherwise be a somewhat traditional 'free helpless villagers from cages' quest structure.

Story implementation is supported by minimal text during quests, but the nuance associated with combat makes up for that. Our spellslinger Settler was a specialist in DPS with multiple ranged skills, some of which required charging, while others could be fired off repeatedly with little wait in-between. Each class in *Wildstar* will have access to 80 skills once they reach the level cap of 50, but for the sake of simplicity the skill bar will only ever accommodate eight different

abilities. Carbine want players to be chopping and changing their abilities in accordance with the challenge in front of them.

The Path system has undoubtedly been designed to encourage social

"Story implementation is supported by minimal text during quests, but the nuances associated with combat makes up for that"

play, and if a Settler character is teamed with a group consisting of all the other paths (Soldier, Scientist and Explorer) not only will they accrue general and path XP at a faster rate, but they'll also be able to take part in more combat missions, and explore

Combat, regardless of class choice, feels very reactive thanks to imaginative power sets and the ability to roll and strafe away from enemy attacks



otherwise inaccessible areas – effectively having the complete *Wildstar* experience while still only playing as one path.

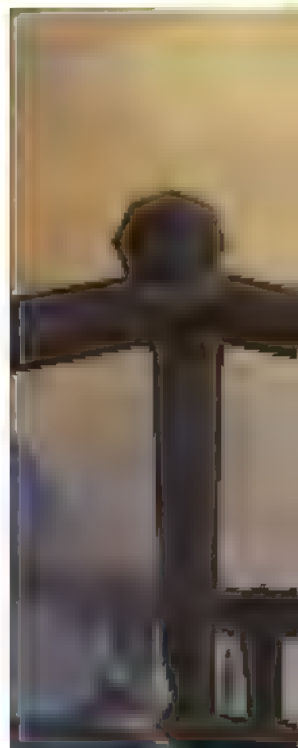
With other MMORPGs going further and further down the story-centric single-player RPG route, *Wildstar's* approach makes the most of the infinite potential and appeal of teaming up with others, and that restoration of traditional online values is immensely exciting.

Even if the thought of questing with others brings you out in a cold sweat, Carbine's debut boasts at least a dozen or so features we wish other games would adopt. Like their social-minded Circle system which, in addition to allowing players to join a single guild, also offers the opportunity for players to group together based on more broad criteria like time-zone, location, interests or playstyle, and the loot doubler which randomly offers

players the chance to double their loot if a player selected ticker lands in the right spot. All these tiny touches combine to produce an experience which feels dense with content, yet light and fluffy in tone, which for an MMORPG is especially novel.

NCSOFT will soon announce that *Wildstar* utilises one of three revenue models: free-to-play, subscription-only, or one-time fee like *Guild Wars 2*. We're happy to report that *Wildstar* has more than enough character to succeed, regardless of which option NCSOFT goes for. We have no idea how our Settler playthrough will play out when servers are full and how much of an impact our actions will have on others, but it's going to prove fascinating to find out.

Roll on the public testing, we shouldn't have long to wait. ■



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WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

HANDS-ON

A shooter in wolf's clothing

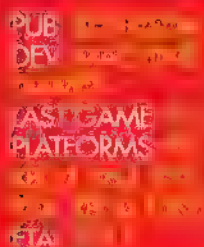
In our fertile imaginations it seems crazy that Indiana Jones and BJ Blazkowicz haven't had an opportunity to team up over the years. They both hate Nazis, they both enjoy cracking wise and they're known to step up to the plate when seemingly unbeatable odds await them. Alas, the id tech5-powered *Wolfenstein: New Order* doesn't feature a whip-cracking sidekick or even Short Round, but that doesn't mean this new venture from Starbreeze veterans MachineGames doesn't take this series in exciting and, dare we say it, unpredictable directions.

The ninth entry in this intrepid first-person shooter series, which dates all the way back to 1981, once again stars the unsuitably named hero William Joseph 'BJ' Blazkowicz,

but the setting has radically altered. Moving from 1940's Germany to an alternative version of Europe in the year 1960 with the Third Reich having conquered the entire planet, thanks to their mysterious new mechanised infantry and AI tech which is light-years ahead of their enemies.

Oddly, it's as if Blazkowicz's activity in previous games is completely null and void, and MachineGames were hesitant to reveal exactly where Hitler and co. received this highly advanced weaponry. However time travel is a good bet as the protagonist finds himself in a perversely twisted alternate version of the past tasked again with a handful of other resistance fighters, to take down the reigning Nazi regime.

What's really impresses about *New*

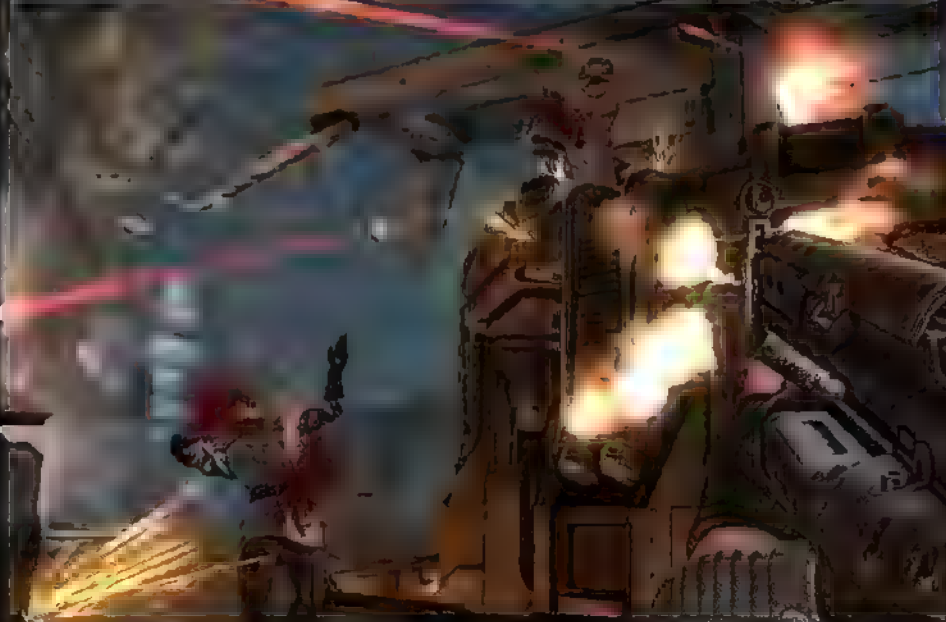





Order is how MachineGames have managed to update the *Wolfenstein* concept while retaining the schlocky coolness of the series. The first demo we were shown encapsulated that evolution perfectly with B.J. kitted out in Nazi servant garb trying to make his way stealthily through a classically resplendent train travelling across Germany. While moving from carriage to carriage he's suddenly collared by an Aryan-blood detecting mech named Bernard, which in turn alerts an aging German General and her Austrian boytoy 'Bubi' to his presence. She sets B.J. down all calmly, apologising for her robot's incorrect assertion that the blood-trained blue-eyed American in front of her is actually Aryan, before she pulls a gun on our hero and puts him



"What really impresses about *New Order* is how MachineGames have managed to update the *Wolfenstein* concept while retaining the schlocky coolness of the series"



Battles in *Wolfenstein* feel fluid and fun with AI that isn't afraid to retreat if needs be



"Choose your answers carefully now"

through a strange Voight-Kampffian test to ascertain his heritage, while explaining that one wrong answer will mean certain death. This 'little game' is revealed to merely be a playful ruse, but it speaks volumes to the kind of cinematic experience that MachineGames are going for. While there's a sinister side to this haunting event, the dialogue between the General and her clearly subservient Junior comes across as both awkward

"The pantomime villainess toys with the lives of the people around her"

and funny in equal measure. This whole section feels both tense yet strangely fun, as the pantomime villainess toys with the lives of the people around her.

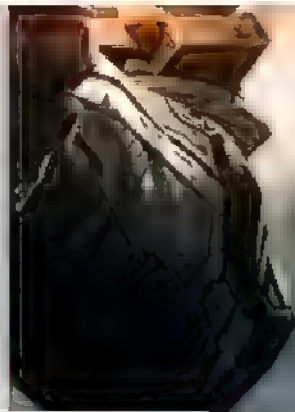
After this linear section we got to play another mission set around infiltrating a Nazi factory dubbed the 'London Nautica', in order to steal some tech for the resistance. This



The 1960 we know
is no more

section was prefaced by a thoroughly Cockney geezer telling us about the occupation and how the invaders levelled almost every part of England's capital, curiously leaving Big Ben untouched, to create this monolithic monstrosity. This area packed a lot more of the gameplay one would expect from a *Wolfenstein*

game. First there was a pitched battle against a chasing robot dog through ruins which in turn gave way to more traditional shooter action with mechs, drones, agile AI guards and airmen running through halls, and emerging from cover attempting to chip more meat away from BJ's fleshy yet sturdy form. Intriguingly, the health





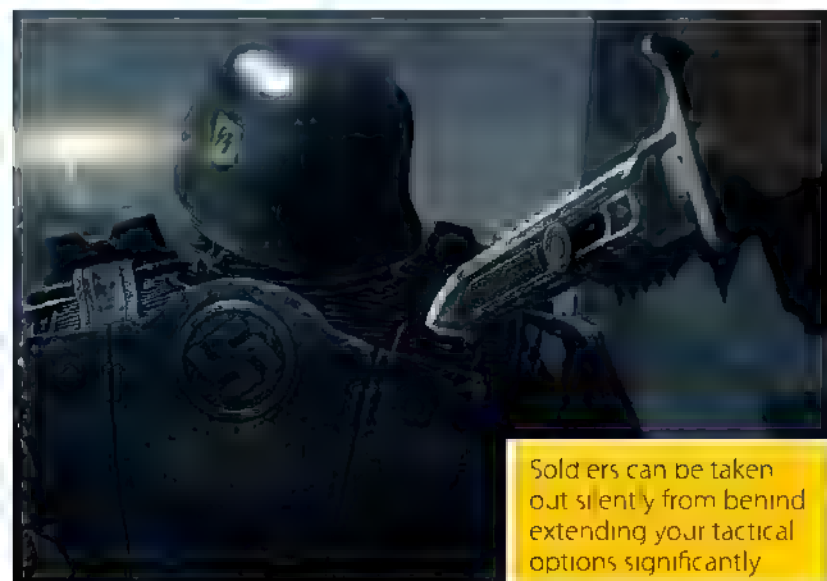
gauge is split into 20-unit increments which regenerate over time. Once it dips below 80, 60, 40 and 20, the only way to then top it up into the next segment again is to loot fallen soldiers for health packs or pick others littered around in storage or hackable safes located in specific places in the environment.

This nifty homage to *Wolfenstein* is just one of many with B.J. able to dual-wield weapons of the same type and boost health to over 100%

temporarily. That annoying modern concession limiting arsenals to a handful of weapons is also completely gone, allowing players to pick up as many weapons as they like – praise be to B.J.!

The talky protagonist also regularly perks up with witty one-liners and monologues to add more of a personal touch to the shooting action. One section of the Nautica mission featured an exhibit dedicated to the Third Reich's apparent landing on the moon, which led the protagonist to utter the soon to be immortal words, "*The Nazis landed on the moon? F**k you moon!*" Yes this line is dumb and it wouldn't seem out of place if it was uttered by Arnie in *Total Recall*, but in a *Wolfenstein* game it totally works.

Mixing up the core combat experience, there's also an effective and entirely optional cover system with players linked to surfaces when they hold the appropriate toggle, but this doesn't slow the pace of *Wolfenstein's* combat down too



Soldiers can be taken out silently from behind extending your tactical options significantly



No, that isn't a xenomorph, it's a robot nazi dog. If we have to tell you one more time

much. The addition of being able to silently kill enemies from behind also gives more food for thought in tackling areas which are otherwise suitable for run-and-gun tactics.

Like old games of old there's that classic feeling of progression with new tech and weaponry becoming available as players progress through the campaign. Once such creation

"The Nazis landed on the moon? F*k you moon!"**

was a laser cutter rifle/tool which could be used to fry rampaging mechs in a couple of shots or to solve traversal puzzles.

MachinGames also want players to explore their surroundings as much as possible, so they've also added an in-game journal/encyclopedia so that players can view tertiary information about the timeframe, locations and any enemies

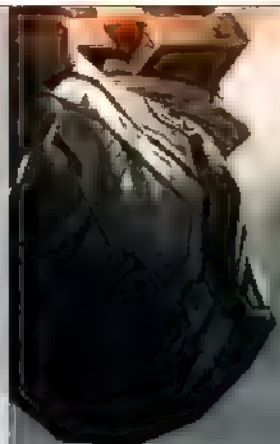
they face along with enigma code segments also scattered around levels revealing otherwise secret info.

The only missing feature in our mind is the lack of any multiplayer or co-op option, which for a *Wolfenstein* game does seem odd, but then the developers are committed to telling a polished cinematic tale and as *Metro: Last Light* proved, sometimes these kinds of sacrifices can lead to a better gaming experience.

All these components used to be a stable part of the first person shooter cocktail, but since *Call of Duty* had its reductive way, developers seem to be following the 'less is more' approach.

Wolfenstein: New Order laughs in the face of increasingly tired modern shooter notions and looks to the past for ideas to liven up the military shooter-dominated marketplace.

B.J. is back boys and girls, and we're mighty glad that he is. ■

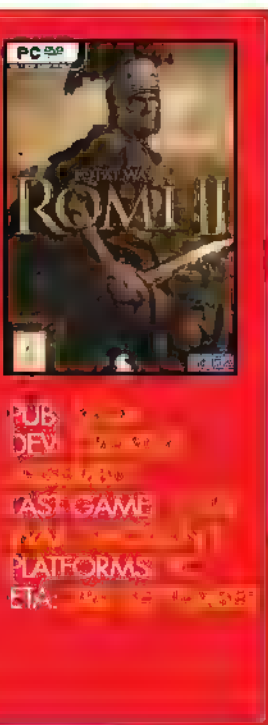


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PREVIEW

TOTAL WAR: ROME II



Looking at *Rome II*'s substantially overhauled campaign map is a lot like gazing into the stars. Zoom out and you get to admire the stunning majesty of a massive area, from modern-day Portugal to Bactria in Afghanistan, but zoom in and you'll get to admire stunning levels of cultural detail like the sand battered Pyramids of Giza or the lush green forests of Germania.

The level of fidelity that CA achieved with *Shogun 2*'s tiny Japanese landmass has been maintained for an entire continent without sacrificing any major geographical or cultural detail and the result is frankly a little daunting. *Rome II*'s version of Europe outstretches anything achieved in the

original *Rome*, or even *Empire: Total War*, boasting 173 regions split into 57 provinces.

Having more landmass and factions to deal with is really just the tip of *Rome II*'s substantialy

"Rome II's version of Europe outstretches anything achieved in the original Rome or even Empire"

more complex strategic iceberg. CA has introduced a whole new diplomacy system with a faction leader's opinion of the player distilled into numerical data representing their previous acts



and their influence – e.g. allying with a faction's enemy versus forming a trade partnership with them. All actions have a plus or minus effect, adding some well overdue context behind AI actions. That said, certain factions will never get along due to historical precedent, and that isn't represented in the relationship menu. Regardless though, this extra transparency is welcome.

A new internal political system has been introduced. Fictional, historical and family figures appear during a playthrough to test your standing as faction leader. These individuals can vary from slaves revolting to an overly ambitious brother, and options about dealing with these potential foes vary

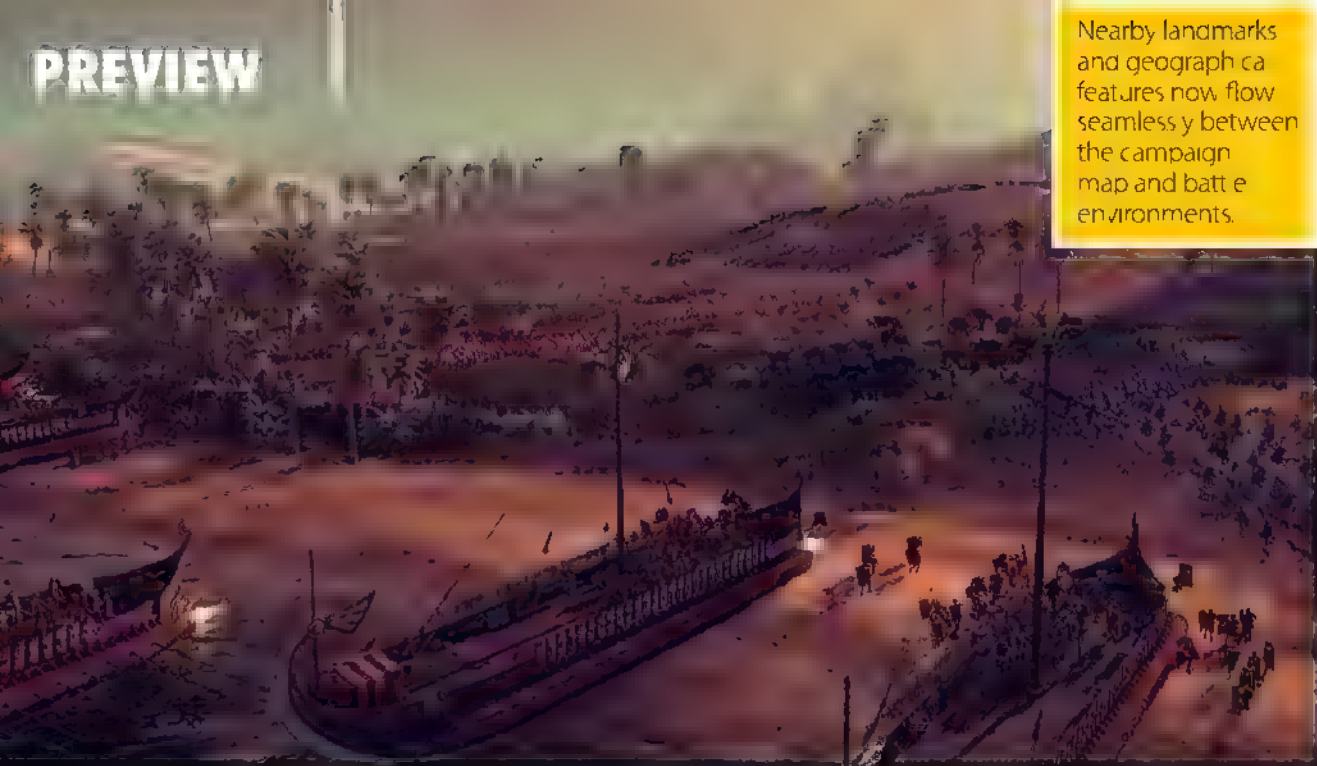
from 'Support, Oppose, Discredit or Assassinate'. Failure to deal with opposition can lead to public unrest and loss of funds, so this new system offers something extra to think about while marshalling your forces.

On the war front, army accumulation has also changed with forces split between core and supplemental units. When in control of Rome the core choices, say Hastati and Velites units, can only be selected in home provinces, and as soon as a legion ventures out of that area they can only recruit local mercenaries in accordance with local traditions. This makes armies feel more varied and gives the empirical Roman force more of a pan-European



PREVIEW

Nearby landmarks and geographical features now flow seamlessly between the campaign map and battle environments.



vibe which is really fun to play around with. Seeing African Elephant units line up alongside Arcani and Onager units gives battles an original and at times surprising flavour.

Supporting this notion of giving armies their own character and nuance is a new Legion system. Armies no longer exist without a label or standard unifying troops. This is to create an identity for any given war band, with the collective's own traditions, name and symbol dictated by the player. The more battles a legion takes part in the more abilities can be unlocked via a dedicated skill tree, and even if an entire army is lost in battle, the skills associated with a legion can be applied to a new set of troops. Units still accrue ranks to increase battle prowess on an individual basis, with the new Legion system operating as





an further layer of customisation.

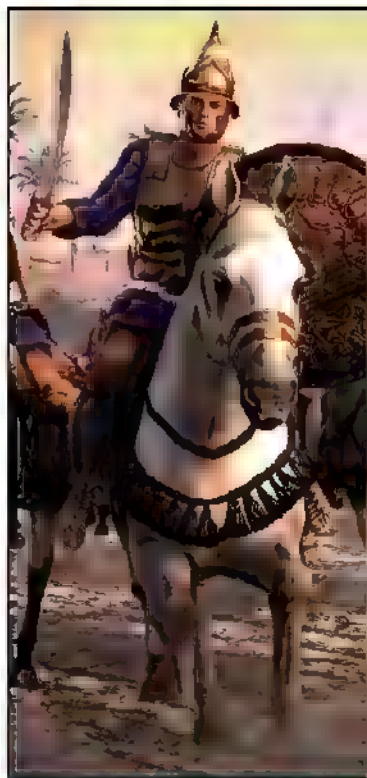
In addition to learning of all these new campaign mechanics we also had a chance to go hands-on with another standalone skirmish set around 47BC's Battle of the Nile.

"CA have radically altered the Total War campaign experience while retaining its core appeal"

This map involved the forces of Julius Caesar and Ptolemy XIII, consisting of ships, war elephants, catapults and cavalry all facing off on a mountain side. Here we got to see how naval and ground combat could influence one another with ships able to ram and sink each in a hail of splinters in addition to providing ranged

support for ground forces and dispensing their forces on land via beachhead. We also got to mess around with battlefield deployables and witnessed multiple rolling boulders squish some unfortunate advancing troops

CA have radically altered the *Total War* campaign experience while retaining its core appeal and that's exciting for potential and old fans alike, care of a multitude of new systems and a new transparent approach to AI design. Of course we won't get an idea of how all these new components tie together until we sample them first-hand, but with *Rome II* set for release September we shouldn't have too long to wait. ■

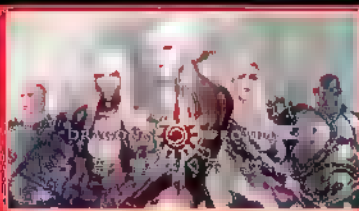


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DRAGON'S PROPHECY

HANDS-ON



PUB Open Beta
DEV NCSOFT
LAST GAME Runes of Magic
PLATFORMS PC
ETA 2014

TWITTER



@Gamerzines

Dragons are dominating the skies of Europe! Are you ready for Open Beta?



@Gamerzines

Dragon's Prophet enters Open Beta. Time to saddle up boys and girls, this dragon ain't gonna ride itself!



@Amazavani

So far Dragon's Prophet isn't so bad. It's a good MMORPG. A bit like How to Train Your Dragon.



@Smolley

Excited for the Dragon's Prophet Open Beta. It's an awesome game, really different feel from other MMOs!



@Lycase

Dragon's Prophet: The Ballad of DraGod #SuperMetal Trailer! <http://youtu.be/zmasLyAdDyc>

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

Free-to-play dragon trainer

As far as unique MMORPG hooks go, being able to charm, ride and customise massive dragons stored handily in your pocket is, frankly, a bloody good one. *Dragon's Prophet* is a brand-new free-to-play effort from the makers of *Runes of Magic*, *Runewaker*, and during a recent hands-on session we were surprised to discover that the formula of this novel experience is one-part *TERA* and two-parts *Pokemon*.

Let's start off with the basics. *Dragon's Prophet* is based in the world Auretia. A landscape which is full of hundreds of different monsters – some of which can be wrangled, trained and controlled for the benefit of the player, while the rest simply want to destroy anything that strays into their aggro-zone. The fiction involves cultists scrambling to free an evil black dragon which was imprisoned thousands of years before the game's timeframe after defeating and extracting the creative essence of the original White Dragon creator – are you starting to notice a theme here?

The trade-off with this admittedly daft premise – all hail the mighty god dragon – is that there's over 300 different monsters in the game world which can be tamed. Breaking animals in is simply a case of meandering up to them in the wild, initiating the capture sequence, which involves characters jumping on their back rodeo-style which is when a Quicktime Event kicks in, and as long as you're an appropriate level to the creature you're trying to capture and you have space in your inventory, a new pet is yours. It's impossible not to be a little won over by *Dragon's Prophet*.

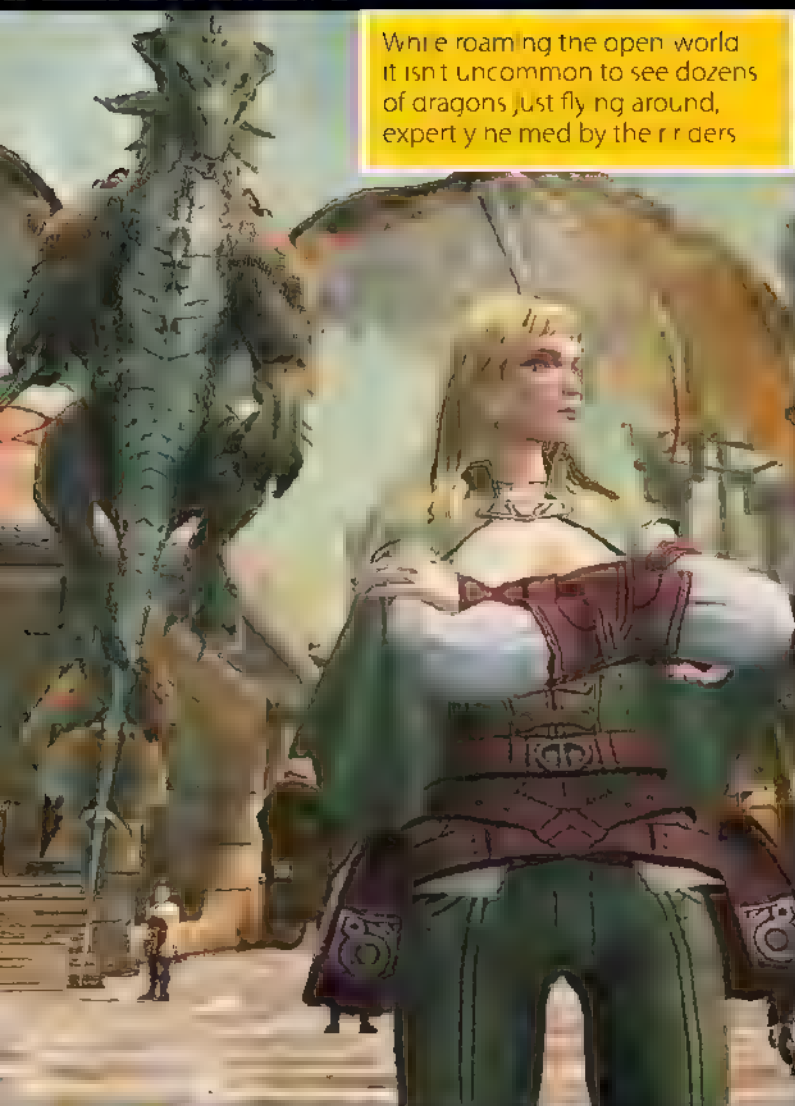


"It's impossible not to be a little won over by Dragon's Prophet when you bag your first creature"

PREVIEW



Each dragon you capture has their own set of skills and specialisations – some can fly, others are great swimmers, while others can give Usain Bolt a run for his money



While roaming the open world it isn't uncommon to see dozens of dragons just flying around, expertly herded by the rangers

when you bag your first creature, be it a Komodo Dragon-looking beach dweller or what looks like a Velociraptor roaming the forest, so much so that we're kind of shocked more MMORPGs haven't adopted this pet approach over the years. When captured, these big (and little) guys will happily fight alongside you with their own attack skills, dished out randomly on capture, they function as a method of transport if those stringy white things underneath your belly are no longer up to scratch, and they can be shown off to others in a slightly less perverse recreation of Crafts – but, you know, without all the rampant dog inbreeding.

Companions can be swapped out at will, with players able to carry up to seven at a time, and they can be sent out on missions independent of whatever quest the player is up to. Stored dragons can even learn skills from each other and they level up as they're used, earning more points to pad out the hexagon of ass-kickery consisting

Points can only be captured by infantry and friendly artillery fire can hurt your own troops as well as the enemy



of strength, constitution, focus, intelligence, focus and ferocity.

Aside from the companion system, combat in *Dragon's Prophet* still feels fairly by the numbers with a classless progression structure and traditional tank, healer, support archetypes. As is the Korean style, warriors tend to wield swords three times too big, and female characters forms are, shall we say, exaggerated. The hallmarks of localisation mean

"Shown off to others in a slightly less perverse recreation of Crufts"

there are usually more quests to take part in than players know what to do with, but at least there's a complex crafting system to mess around with, and the environments seem interesting enough to explore. We found ourselves on a tropical island starting area with a flying dragon mount and scaling the heights while looking down at the people below proved fun.

During our tour we were also shown the housing mechanic with players able to snap up their own part of the persistent world, and a separate siege-esque PvP mode with competing clans trying to take over castles for their own band to utilise. Interestingly, all these finite areas have their own unique farmable crystals which cannot be found anywhere else in the game, so for crafters being part of a powerful guild certainly holds an advantage.

Dragon's Prophet lacks its own visual style, but when it comes to gameplay and the potentially genre-changing henchmen system, it certainly stands out in the free-to-play space.

Currently Runwaker's latest is in open Beta, so there's nothing stopping wannabe tamers from giving it a try. Who knows, dragon riding might just be your thing. ■



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ASHES CRICKET 2013

CRICKET RETURNS TO THE MAINSTREAM ONCE MORE



You wouldn't know it, but cricket games are actually experiencing a resurgence at the moment. While beloved series like *Brian Lara's Cricket* have gone the way of the dodo, the still brilliant management sim *International Cricket Captain* still comes out every year and there's a host of more casual experiences to be had on either the iOS or Android marketplace.

The opinion that England's most stoically English sport is under-represented in games isn't true, it's just that interactive takes on the bat and ball past time have retreated away from traditional

retail and are usually digital-only.

Encouragingly, *Ashes Cricket 2013* bucks that trend, packing in every player, kit and stadium for this year's England versus Australia test tours and they've

"Unparalleled control never seen in a cricket game before"

hired Mark Nicholas, David Lloyd and Mark Slater to form the game's commentary team. At a recent press event we only got a brief glimpse of *AC 2013*, but the new engine looked promising.

Before any game takes place there's a detailed breakdown of pitch condition and weather, so players can make an educated decision on whether to bat or bowl first.



When bowling, players choose length and direction of the ball they're pitching as well as style e.g. cut, swing, straight etc. Batting has also evolved with Trickster Games boasting unparalleled control never seen in a cricket game before. There's over 80 different batting animations, all of which blend into each another succinctly, with shot determination based on direction of the stick and timing of a button press. Finishing off the trifecta of cricket gameplay is fielding, and here Trickster has built on what they accomplished with *International Cricket 2010* by incorporating a new editor that

allows players to place fielders by hand, in addition to offering 50 default configurations. The fielding system can be automated if the player prefers and there's even the option to auto-finish innings if you don't have time to finish a game.

Pitches also evolve during matches, changing from slow to quick as play evolves. Trickster are talking up *AC 2013* as being both deep and accessible in an attempt to attract casual and hardcore fans alike. While we couldn't test that claim ourselves by playing the game, it's good to that at least one cricket game out there is returning to the mainstream. Howzat! ■

THE INESCAPABLE TRENDS OF E3 2013

END OF SHOW REVIEW

Between June 10th and June 13th the games industry's biggest conference E3 took place in downtown LA. Developers, publishers, console manufacturers, journalists and retail buyers descended on the LA Convention Centre to learn what games and hardware will be heading to the most lucrative entertainment industry in the world (bigger than films, comics, television or books) over the coming months.

2013 in particular is going to be a massive year for gamers as finally after all the pomp and circumstance of pre-E3 conferences, Microsoft and Sony confirmed that they would be releasing their next gen consoles, the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One respectively before Christmas in both North American and European territories. Obviously that news was very exciting, but really this opening salvo in the console wars was really just a tiny part of the overall show. There were much bigger subjects in play this year including the increased adoption of online-all-the-time frameworks, asynchronous gameplay between tablets, PC and consoles and the increasingly controversial subject of game ownership. E3 is all about the games, but it's also about where developers think our hobby is heading in the future. Here's the inescapable trends of E3 2013. ■

Cars, cars, cars, cars, CARS!

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

Ask any developer and they'll tell you that they've been waiting for the next console generation for a very long time. New hardware means better graphics, more processing power and more imaginative game design, and surprisingly the clearest indicator of all three of these was a host of newly revealed racing games. The likes of a new *Gran Turismo* and *Need for Speed: Rivals* propped up Sony and EA's press conferences respectively, with Ubisoft revealing their own MMO driving experience *The Crew*, but

in the innovation stakes, *Forza Motorsport 5* and away the most daring of these new races that's purely down to the AI behavioural model and 'Driveatar' mechanic bringing the unpredictable real racing competition to offline play via a mapped personalist player profiles distribution.

Racing games are set to experience a renaissance when the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 appear, frankly we couldn't be happier about it. It has been a long time coming in this beloved genre and thankfully we're about to see much more

Console Wars

PLAYSTATION 4 VS XBOX ONE

generation that trend changes massively. Microsoft are aiming specifically for the tech-savvy market, with the Xbox One requiring the Kinect camera to be plugged in at all times for the console

ownership (a kin to iTunes or Steam) with players required to 'phone home' to Xbox Live in order to verify games every 24 hours. Crucially, this means that play

For PlayStation 4 however, Sony is

off. Naturally this revelation created a clear divide between the two hardware manufacturers' approaches, with Sony deliberately calling out Microsoft's practices while few voices were heard speaking in favour of the Xbox One's game ownership policy. No doubt this argument will run and run as each console's end of year arrival approaches, but importantly there's still time for this dividing lines to shift



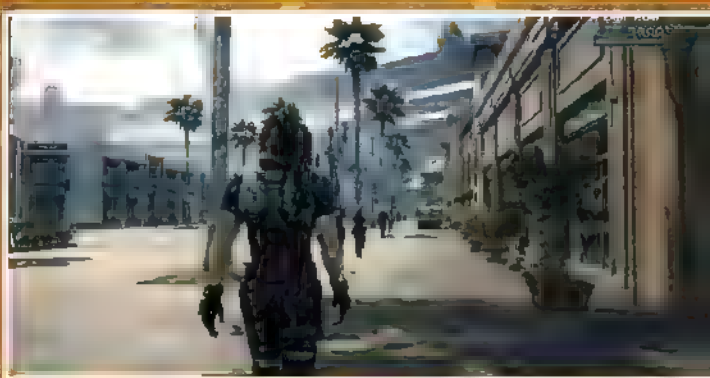
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Return of the Mech X

Hands-up if you thought the next game from the makers of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* was going to be a mech shooter? Any of you? Well, we didn't see it coming. The thing is Respawn Entertainment weren't the only developer jumping on the mech bandwagon at E3, with Monolith Soft also touting their new spiritual successor to *Xenoblade Chronicles* codenamed, 'X'.

Mechs are coming back in a big way with celebrated free-to-play games *MechWarrior Online* and *Hawken* also propagating the increased interest of gamers wanting to knock six shades of steel out of each other in big walking tanks. Here's hoping the rise of the mechanised warrior will, somehow, tempt Koei into making another *Dynasty Warriors: Gundam*.



Nintendo Continue to do their Own Thing

MARIO KART 8

While Sony and Microsoft held their own pre-E3 keynotes, Nintendo elected to do their own thing by streaming a special Nintendo Direct episode directly to their audience. They still had many of their newly announced games on E3's showfloor, like *Mario Kart 8* and *Super Mario 3D World*, but wisely the Japanese console manufacturer/developer saved a lot of money by not going to the effort of holding a conference at the Chinese Mann Theatre, as they've done for previous E3's over the

past decade. Nintendo announced this move and while many journalists scoffed at the decision it panned out rather well. All the games announced during the E3 special Nintendo Direct still dominated NeoGAF, Twitter and Reddit chatter days after they were announced and fans got all the information needed in a quick and succinct manner, without the pomp and glamour of a propaganda-ridden keynote.

Every year publishers and developers gauge if E3 is really necessary and Nintendo proved that while the show is still important, a publisher

Talking up Tablets

TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

Talk of tablet integration in games, be it via Microsoft's *Smartglass* or more platform-agnostic tech, was absolutely everywhere at this year's E3. For some strange reason industry execs have got it in their heads that we don't want to stare at one device for our interactive entertainment, instead we need to endlessly transition between watching the television screen, phone and tablet, and that's slowly bleeding into games. To be fair, *The Division's* integration of tablet support feeds into competitive multiplayer, with tablet gamers able to control drones which support player squads which occupy the game-world. That kind of cross-platform mechanic is cool, but we question how many gamers will actually make use of it.



More No Shows **THE LAST GUARDIAN**

Public opinion was definitely with Sony after E3, thanks largely to their very deliberate public swipes at Microsoft's DRM policies regarding the Xbox One. That's all well and good, but we were still disappointed that questions about the apparently still forthcoming exclusive *The Last Guardian* were still not answered definitively.

Rumours were that Team Ico's game had been cancelled, but the public message from Sony went from agreeing to disputing the claim, depending on which executive was asked the question. This trend of conflicting corporate messaging was rife at E3, and Sony weren't the only company guilty of it, but when it comes to a fan favourite like *The Last Guardian*, how difficult is it to be straight with fans and tell them what exactly is going on? Hopefully we'll get more answers at the Tokyo Game Show in September, as if this game really is canned that would be a massive shame for all involved, especially gamers.



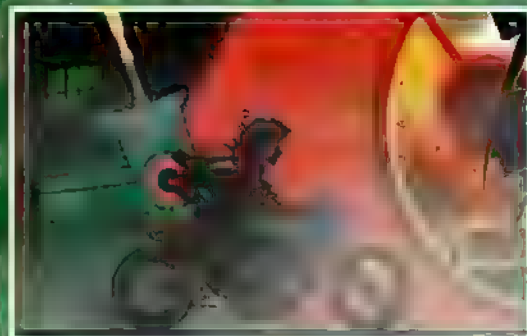
The Fall of the Military Shooter **CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS**

Just being a military shooter isn't enough to curry favour with mainstream gamers, and that was the big message from the 2013 E3. It is something more passionate gamers, like *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, has known for years, but it seems this year publishers also got the message. Activision saved their reveal of *Call of Duty: Ghosts* for a press event on the EA nestled *Sanitarium* 4, surprisingly reflective multiplayer reveal for the first point of their big keynote. The big takeaway from all

of this is that the classic archetypal military shooter is no longer sufficient enough to excite new hardcore gamers. Now efforts need go into 64-player competitive multiplayer or an arena quadruped in order to make an impression on gamers, developers, investors, and publishers excited about that new trend. Exciting, the likes of Infinity Ward and Gears will get outside of the box for their respective and which should result in better games for

Indies vs Exclusives TRANSISTOR

Of all the new trends which emerged at E3, we were most happy to see cult gaming figures like *Transistor*, *Hotline Miami*, *Superluminarias*, *Blow (Braid)*, Supergiant Games and Klei Entertainment finally get the attention they deserve in the gaming mainstream. All four entities and their forthcoming wares were paraded out by Microsoft, while at the same time showing what kind of refreshingly original releases will make the way to Xbox One and PlayStation 4 respectively. Games like *Transistor*, *Hotline Miami*, *Blow (Braid)*, *Superluminarias*, *The Witness* and *D4* were exposed to audiences who usually would never have turned to them due to their preference of console over PC, which frankly is a good move from both



increasingly pathetic tactic of tying up certain releases to specific platforms. We aren't talking about first-party games, as if Sony and Microsoft are spending the resources to make games like *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto* exclusive to one platform simply because enough of an 'incentive' has been thrown Capcom's and EA's way. The only person that loses out of this kind of deal are gamers and it's sad to see that publishers are still deliberately limiting their audience for short-term gain. Inevitably *Dead Rising 3* and *Titanfall* will come to PS4 and PC eventually so why not



any shooter is
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Upcoming DLC & UGC

The Walking Dead: 400 Days

DLC

PUB: Telltale
DEV: Telltale
ETA: July

Telltale Games' popularity has skyrocketed over the past year, thanks largely to the release of *The Walking Dead*. The thing is we liked them back when they were exclusively mining the LucasArts back catalogue for ideas, so that makes us much cooler than all the other e-mags in existence, so there! Internet hubris aside, the *400 Days* DLC functions as a bridge between the events of the first *Walking Dead* episodic series and the next lot set to be released later this year. Telltale has said that this new DLC will intertwine the

stories of five different characters, with players controlling each of them throughout this bulky episode's running time. As long as Clementine makes an appearance then we're onboard. ■



Guild Wars 2: Dragon Bash

DLC

PUB: NCSoft
DEV: NCSoft
Runs on: PC, PS3, Xbox 360

ArenaNet's continued experimentation with live events continues this month with the yearly celebration known as 'Dragon Bash'. Yes, we know *Guild Wars 2*

technically hasn't been out for a year yet, but the occupants of Tyria need some distraction to make the ever-present threat of dragon-based annihilation seem a bit more tolerable.

If you venture into Lion's Arch over the next month you'll find the pirate capital transformed with new decorations, game modes like Moa Racing and a new PvP gametype called Dragon Ball, new loot and a lengthy new questline with a new voiced dialogue, cut-scenes and instanced missions all with a distinct film noir flavour. Not shabby for a free update, that's for sure.



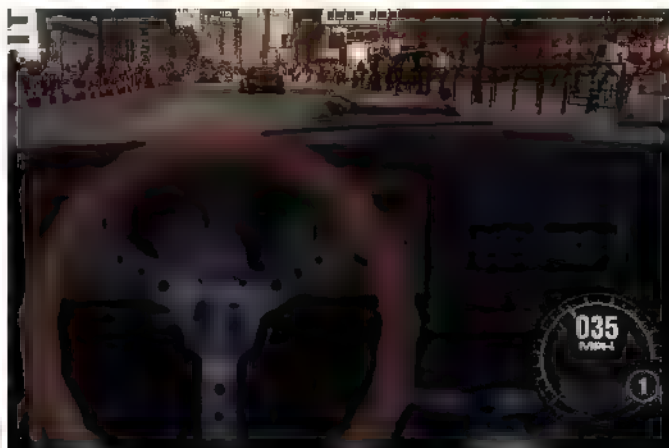
GRID 2: Cockpit View



DEV: Codemasters
FIND IT: www.racedepartment.com/forum/resources
OUT NOW

GRID 2 proved to be one of the most controversial racing games released by Codemasters in recent years. It wasn't that the sequel wasn't any good, far from it, it's just that *GRID 2* represented a big departure from what the series used to stand for. The fictional World Series Racing championship and an emphasis on traditional road cars racing than racing cars put a bit of sad spin on what was otherwise a really entertaining experience. The lack of any cockpit view was also a major bugbear for many fans, but thankfully a team of modders, via racedepartment.com, have managed to

put together a workable solution to that omission. Cockpit views using this mod still aren't a patch on the original *GRID*'s in-car view, but the low-res modelling and blurry textures will have to do. ■



Skyrim: Here Be Monsters



DEV: Araanim
FIND IT: Steam Workshop
OUT NOW

This mod from Araanim includes an inspired quote from *Godzilla* creator Ishiro Honda: "Monsters are tragic beings. They are born too tall, too strong, too

heavy. They are not evil by choice. That is their tragedy."

That slice of age-old wisdom sums up this new piece of content for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* very nicely. *Here Be Monsters* adds nine giant mythical creatures to Skyrim's Ghost Sea, based on various world myths about terrors from the deep. Learning about each monster is a case of talking to survivors and learning their location before journeying to their dwelling for an epic battle. Seeing a 20-storey tall ice ape fighting off a dragon proved the highlight of this content, but we couldn't help wondering who the real monster was, us or them. ■



Borderlands 2: Dragon's Keep

DLC

PUB: 2K Games
DEV: Gearbox Software
ETA: June 25th

While we adore Tiny Tina, there is a portion of the *Borderlands 2* audience that find her constant references to online culture annoying more than endearing. Frankly we can't see what the hell they're complaining about as we love Ash, I mean Tina. She's completely her own original character and not an example of *Borderlands 2*'s Lead Writer Anthony Burch getting more work for his sister, star of "Hey Ash, Watcha Playing?" Well, we're all about to see a whole lot more of Tiny Tina, as the *Dragon's Keep* DLC places her as a deranged dungeon master in a game of *Dungeons & Dragons*

starring the rest of the *Borderlands* crew. Expect lots of fourth-wall breaking anecdotes and an all-new 10-hour questline which is set to surprise players every step of the way. ■



Leviathan: Warships Update

DLC

PUB: Pieces Int.
DEV: Paradox Int.
OUT NOW

Okay, so the title of this free update to the turn-based naval strategy game *Leviathan: Warships* isn't quite all that but it's content certainly is. Along with packing in all the usual gameplay tweaks you'd

expect from a post-launch patch, Paradox Interactive has added their beloved pun-man Jazz Boatman, otherwise known as the guy who voices the trailers, and a bunch of jazz to *Leviathan: Warships* just for giggles.



This new content needs to be switched on in the menu options, and from there you're all set to have a smooth yet groovy experience. A bit of humour can go a long way when it comes to making tablet-friendly strategy game stand out, and it's always good to see a developer and publisher chuck some free content the player's way. Now that's what we're talking a-boat! ■

Operation Black Mesa



DEV: Tripmine Studios
FIND IT: tripminestudios.com
ETA: TBA

A few issues back we wrote about the triumph of *Black Mesa Source* and how it would be great if a team of intrepid modders attempted to update and beautify the beloved *Half-Life* expansion, *Opposing*

Fronts in *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine. Well consider our prayers answered as *Operation Black Mesa* is exactly that, with a bunch of new AI tweaks and gameplay elements chucked in for good measure. *Operation Black Mesa* has been in development since 2007, but recent releases of new video and shots of the game in motion encourage the idea that *Half-Life* fans will soon get the remake of *Opposing Fronts* that they've been crying out for near enough a decade at this point. We have our fingers crossed. ■



Thief Gold HD



DEV: Bentraxx
FIND IT: [ModDB](http://moddb.com)
ETA: TBA

Texture packs aren't exactly the most exciting mods in the world, but we'll be damned if they don't serve a purpose in updating outstanding games for the benefit of players in years to come. Certainly 16-bit releases of old are the exception to that rule, simply because their sprite-based art style has stood the test of time, but 3D polygon-orientated releases frankly need all the help they can get. That's where the mod community comes in, as even though Square-Enix has the time and resources to update *Thief* properly, they're way too preoccupied with the modern day reboot to take the time and attention necessary to painstakingly redraw every texture. That's a

labour of love and that's what Bentraxx and his team are doing. Expect new water textures, high-res character models and more inclusions to drag the old *Thief* into the modern era. ■



ISSUE 06

NEXT MONTH



FINAL FANTASY XIV: A REALM REBORN



WORLD OF WARPLANES

FirstLook | NextMonth

**ISSUE 7:
JULY
19TH**



SAINTS ROW 4

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